

When the Milk Consumers Went On a Strike

By INIS WEED

WITH milk selling at 17 and 18 cents a quart the householder wants to know why. More than that, he wants to know how he can get it for less, and what form of ownership and control will secure milk to the public at rock bottom prices.

The choice is now between four different methods. The present one is that of private monopoly. The day of small competitive distributing concerns is practically past. Increased sanitary standards, the necessary large scale transportation, the expensive bottling and pasteurizing machinery require capitalization on a large scale. These requirements have eliminated practically all small distributing concerns except those on the edge of the city. To-day four firms have a practical monopoly of milk distribution in New York and Brooklyn. The tendency is toward still greater monopoly.

An Eye Single to Profits Means Decreased Production

This method is fraught with several dangers for the consuming public. First, its chief interest is profits. Neither is it so much interested in keeping up the maximum milk production, which means cheaper milk for us, so much as it is in making a good profit on what it does sell. The pressure on the farmers under the present method has resulted in the raising of 84,000 less heifer calves in New York State this year, and last year it was 25 per cent less than the year before. In Orange County alone twenty-five carloads of beautiful dairy cattle have been shipped for slaughter between the first and the ninth of this month, according to John Altman, one of the best dairymen in that district. This pressure, with its resultant reduction of the milk output, means higher prices. Then there is the difficulty of securing effective public control over private monopolies.

Who Shall Distribute What Milk We Have?

The second method of securing milk now under consideration is the public ownership of distribution, but it is a grave question whether our political in-

tegrity and our public efficiency are yet equal to the handling of so technical a problem and one involving so many millions of dollars.

The Dairymen's League, which represents between 60,000 and 70,000 dairymen and farmers, is striving to develop public opinion in favor of distribution by the producers of milk. It is their contention that they would be satisfied to make the distribution at cost for the opportunity of producing as much milk as possible and making a fair profit on that, thus saving the consumer the distributor's profit and giving him the cheaper milk that always results from increased production. Well and good. But in the end should we not be in the hands of a monopoly whose interests were theirs rather than ours?

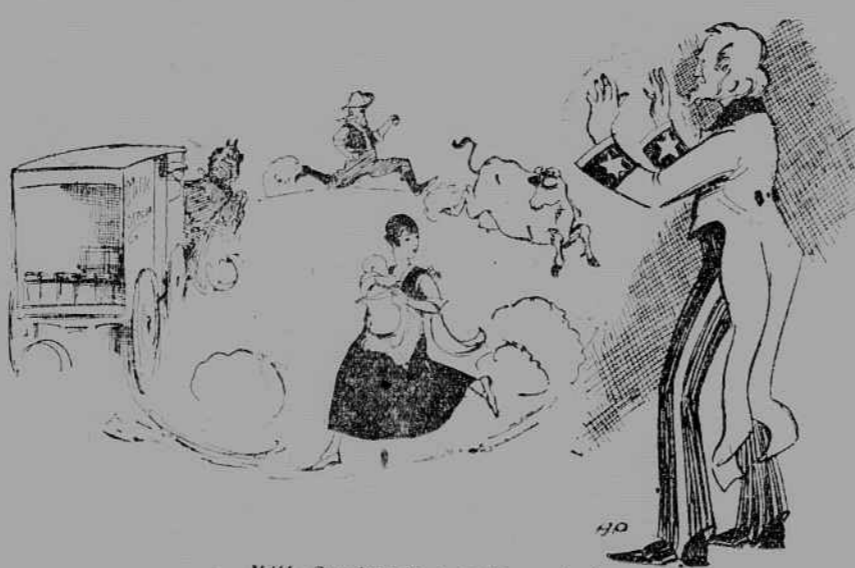
The other method which is advocated is the cooperative ownership of distribution by the consumers themselves. This would be a truer balance of interests. It would require a campaign of education, but it can be done. It is being done in other places. Five Massachusetts towns have cooperative milk distribution, notably, Fitchburg, Worcester and Maynard. They have been established by those most successful cooperators, the Finns, who come to this country with a background of experience in cooperation.

Just before the war, when some of the dealers began to raise the price of milk, not only the amount necessitated by the increased cost of production, but also a little for themselves, then it was that the Finns in the manufacturing city of Fitchburg, next in Worcester and then in Maynard, went on strike against the high cost of milk. They were hard working, independent, frugal people, and they proposed to have milk for their children at rock bottom prices.

A Consumers' Milk Strike

It came as a surprise to the milkmen on their routes when family after family refused to buy. It was no question of a reduced amount, but no milk at all, literally none. As the driver turned his milk wagon into the Finnish district of Maynard and stopped at the Niemalas' doorstep, there was no ticket in the bottle. On the Makelas' doorstep was a bottle containing a scrawled piece of

How the Finns of Massachusetts Distribute Their Own Milk Supply



Milk flowing in a vicious circle

paper with the words, "No more milk," written in laborious English. Thus it went. At the Orovos' not even a bottle was out. At the Leomas' there was a determined woman in the doorway telling him in broken but forcible English what she thought of a system that robbed little children of their birthright. On the corner he met Finnish workmen, who asked him, with a grin, "How the milk business have goin' to-day?"

The first day the children whimpered because there was no milk, and the babies did not take altogether kindly to the change in regimen from fresh cow's milk to patented baby foods. The second day there were more fretful children who were upset by not having their daily drinks of milk, and there were babies who cried all night with colic from the change to patented foods. There were little Frieda and wee Marie, who were very ill indeed, and the doctors said this would never do, that parents could not, simply must not, try to strike on a milk question. But the Finns are a stubborn and determined race. Proud, too, and having taken their stand they would not go back on it.

The result was that one of the Finnish men got an old horse and a cart and went driving out over the countryside among the farming folk to see who would sell him milk. It was not hard to find a farmer who agreed to sell his milk direct. So he came driving back into town with milk, not enough on such short notice for every one, but milk enough for most of the very little babies in the neighborhood. And the next day he brought more, and the next more.

Out With the Old Horse and Wagon

The upshot of the matter was that the Finns decided to meet their problem as they had been taught to do in the old country, for in Finland cooperation thrives, as it does in England, Belgium, Denmark and various other European countries. Whether the milk distributors were asking only a "fair profit," as their term goes, or an unreasonable profit, why shouldn't they, the Finnish people, sell themselves milk and get it as cheaply as possible, they asked. So the old horse and cart became a regular institution not only in one town, but soon

in five towns. The Finnish neighbors all chipped in with loans to meet the need for a little capital and started in business for themselves. They did not sell at the retail price and then return the savings to the shareholders, as do most cooperatives. They sold it outright as cheaply as they figured it could be done. This, I am told, was true in each town, but the operation of the plan in Fitchburg is of especial interest. They kept on enlarging their business through loans secured from thrifty Finns who believed in cooperation. They employed a manager. Business seemed prosperous, but woe betide as the year ran on they found themselves not only with no profits, but serious deficits. They had been selling too close to cost, as they had not appreciated the amount of overhead expense involved. Neither had the manager proved to be an efficient person. The middleman did not seem quite such an ogre, after all. Things



Could Uncle Sam be the milk man?

looked gloomy. But the Finns set their teeth and kept on.

Coöperation Has Its "Glooms" and Its Hopes

A group of born and bred Americans would probably have abandoned the project when they saw there was not a saving to be returned from the supposedly fabulous profits to be made by the distribution of milk. That has been the trouble with Americans as cooperators. Each man has been too keen to get quick money out of his little venture. That is why America has come to be

known as "the graveyard of coöperation." But the Finns were not out for profits, only for bedrock prices. They did not lose their faith in coöperation. Here was where their stubborn character came in, and their European training—for coöperation is a success on the other side of the Atlantic. Finland is honey-combed with cooperatives, and to-day every third person in England is fed through the cooperatives, so numerous are the cooperative groceries. If their venture was a losing one it must be because of their bad management, argued the Finns.

Obviously, they could not sell milk so cheaply. Obviously, too, to secure cheap milk required most efficient management. So they raised the price a little nearer the retail price, got a more experienced manager and started anew, assessing themselves 25 cents a week until the deficit was met. They sell milk from 1 to 3 cents cheaper than the retail price, according to the fluctuating costs of distribution. Their first interest is not profits, but even selling milk as cheaply as they do, they clear something over \$1,000 for every 2,200 quarts distributed daily throughout the year. This they turn back into the business.

The Secret of Successful Coöperation

That is the secret of success in cooperative ventures abroad—and here, when they succeed. In Europe such ventures have started among poor people who had not the "get rich quick" psychology of America. They knew they could never hope to save or make much, even in a lifetime of hard work, in these older countries. They realized that the profits of a few cooperative shares would not be much in actual money to each man and woman, but that pooled and put back in the business it becomes a source of many social benefits to them.

Take, for example, what the bakeries have meant socially to the Belgian coöperators. When the man is out of work the bread cart stops at the door and leaves the loaf just the same. So it is, too, if he is ill. When the baby comes there arrives fresh from the bakery a cake—oh, how big and beautiful!—with which to celebrate the happy day, and there is free bread for twelve days afterward. The bakery supports "the people's house," a big, friendly club, with social gatherings and chatting, games

and dancing, clubs and discussion. In Brussels that corresponds to our Union League Club has been bought for the coöperators. The bakery has also provided a day nursery for the children and old age pensions.

It was such visions as these in the minds of the determined Finns that kept them going in the face of failure. And they have succeeded.

Their weakness has been the hazard involved in selling on so close a margin. It is wiser to sell at retail prices and return the difference at stated intervals. To-day they are merging with the International Coöperative Stores, a chain of coöperative stores run by the Finns in Massachusetts, which has behind it an efficient wholesale buyer. Heretofore this Milk Consumers' League has not sold shares, but done its business on a loan basis, gradually paying back the loans from the profits. Its paid capital is now \$5,000. From now on it will sell shares according to the regular cooperative plan, and the basis of control will be "one man, one vote," like all bona fide cooperatives.

Even Siberia Coöperates; Why Not New York?

Of course, to undertake such a project in New York City as cooperative milk distribution is a much larger and much more difficult undertaking. It would require a great deal of organizing and the raising of a great deal of capital, but why should not the people be thinking of these things and working out figures on such problems? "We are the sovereign power." What we are determined to do we can do if we will only work hard enough. Think what the combined profits of the milk business in New York City might yield in the way of social benefits. As profits to be returned to each householder the amount would not be much, but kept together to enlarge the business and to provide social benefits, think how much richer the community would be!

In this connection it is interesting to know that 90 per cent of the dairy business in Siberia is coöperatively owned. Coöperative groups own 1,600 creameries (no, that's not a misprint), 800 distributive societies and do a business of \$38,000,000 a year. Aren't you surprised? Hadn't you always thought of Siberia as a dismal land of prisoners and salt mines and frozen steppes? It's true about the prisoners, of course. Perhaps that's the secret of the great success that coöperation enjoys in Siberia, all the liberal minded men being sent there as fast as the old regime could ferret them out and pack them off.

The Dairymen's League here in New York is an evidence of what producers have been able to do, but it is a kind of coöperation that obviously does not benefit the consumer. It is consumers' cooperatives which are now needed.

The "Sisters" of the A. E. F. Talk It Over

By ELEN FOSTER

FOUR young women in dainty bou-doir caps and fluffy silk negligees sat up in four white beds in a big, sunny corner room at the top of the Polyclinic Hospital and talked about the war. They were a small contingent of the nurses who had been sent home from the hospitals overseas to recover from the effects of the influenza—thirty of whom are in the Polyclinic Hospital. Two of the group had worked in France and two in England, but all were equally homesick.

"You all can't understand what it means unless you've been through it yourself," said the little blond one from Mississippi, "but it's an experience that I wouldn't have missed for all the world, and if my poor old heart never does stop beating in rag-time I shall still be everlastingly grateful that I had the privilege of taking care of our boys over there."

Being a Sister to Him Has a New Meaning

"They called us 'sisters,'" said the tall, dark one in the corner, whose home is in the state of Maine. "I suppose because of the nurses who work in so many of the hospitals, but bless your heart, we were more than sisters to them; we were mothers and sweethearts and even grandmothers to those boys. We wrote their letters, mended their clothes, scolded them and watched over them sometimes until the end came."

"One of the most difficult things that I had to do," broke in Miss St. Louis, who was nibbling chocolates in the bed between the windows, "was to 'buck up' the Tommies when they got discouraged and were loath to go back to the fighting line. I used to feel so sorry for them! Often a poor little lad who had been in the fight from the beginning, who had been wounded repeatedly and patched up and sent back to the fighting line, would lose his courage and say to me, 'Sister, I'm all fed up on this blooming war. I just can't go back—it's a terrible nightmare to me. My heart's not in it any more.' Do you know how I cured that boy? I read 'In Flanders Fields' to him, and I never once got beyond, 'To you from failing hands we throw the torch' without being interrupted by, 'That'll do, sister, I'm on me way!'"

"Can you imagine any one of us settling down to private nursing, to taking care of a nervous woman, a child with the measles or an old man with the rheumatism, after experiences like that?" asked the fourth young woman, who lives somewhere in New Jersey. "I just hate to think of the future," sighed Miss St. Louis, "I hate to think of regular hours for meals, of comfortable steam heated rooms and all the other luxuries that we have been longing for for the past year and a half. I want to go back to the old barracks at Rouen and the twelve hours' steady work, which during the big drives became twenty-four on a stretch."

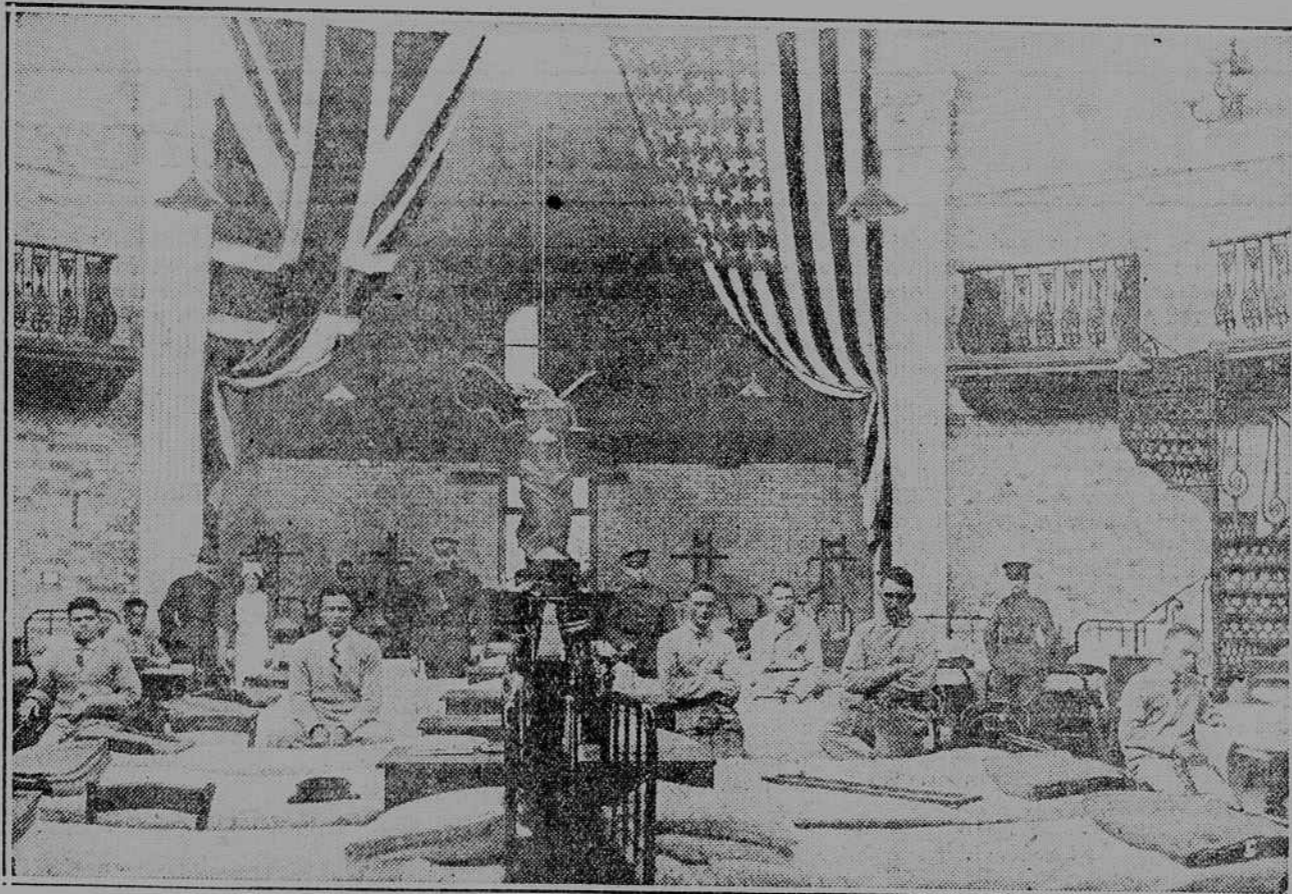
"Awful" But Happy Days

"They were the happy days," sighed the young woman from Maine. "Happy days—and some awful, awful days," she added. "If you will ask any nurse the most awful experience that came to her overseas, I'll wager that she will answer, 'the March push.' You couldn't possibly imagine the dreadfulness of it, the terrible depression everywhere, for every last one of us was sure that the jig was up and the Allies beaten. It was all too horrible for words. I have seen great big British artillerymen throw themselves on their cots and cry like babies, and who could blame them, after the four awful years of fighting and suffering, to find that it had only come to this. For a week or more we lived in that terrible 'Slough of Despond' and then all of a sudden came the news that our boys—our own American boys—had come in time. We had a little victory celebration of our own in the hospital and it was pretty difficult to keep the wounded 'Tommies' in their beds; some had to be held down by main force. And maybe we girls weren't proud of our country! It was the happiest day of our lives."

"And then our own wounded boys began to come in," Miss St. Louis took up the story. "I was on duty in the operating theatre. We had five tables and only three nurses to keep them going, and the convoys of wounded kept coming in a steady stream day and night, from April until October. I had just two half-days off during that time and I shouldn't have taken those only they drove me out. We ate most of our meals in the operating theatre and as for sleep, if we got three or four hours in the twenty-four we felt we were pampered pets. But it was worth it. I wouldn't take a million dollars for that experience."

"Me, too," said the State of Maine. "Moi aussi," echoed the girl from Jersey.

"Were any of you wounded?" I asked.



This was a swimming pool in Devonshire before the war

"No, but I can't think how we escaped, for we were under fire the greater part of the time. You see the Hun was anxious to get at the munition stores which were very near us, and they were constantly bombing us. We wore steel helmets when we went out while the shrapnel was flying. Before they gave us the helmets we used to go about with tin basins or pails on our heads. It just seemed that we couldn't get away from that kind of excitement, for when I went up to Paris on leave it was just the same. Big Bertha spoke her little piece every twenty minutes dur-

ing the day and there was an air raid every night."

When Tommies and Yanks Really Get Together

"France has had the centre of the stage long enough," interrupted the young woman from Jersey. "I must speak a word for my beloved England. I served for nearly a year in the hospital at Winchester, and I want to make a statement right here and now: if anybody tells you that the English don't like us, that there is any feeling between the fighting men of the two na-

tions except the kindest, friendliest in the world, just don't you believe it. It is nothing more nor less than insidious German propaganda. I never hear that sort of talk that a certain picture doesn't flash across my mind, and so long as that memory remains with me nothing on earth can change my opinion.

"I see the little cemetery on the hill at Winchester where we buried our boys who 'went West' after they came to us. It is the 30th of last May, Decoration Day, and that little 'God's Acre' is crowded with people. In the centre stands the Mayor of Winchester

in his robes of office, surrounded by the dignitaries of the town and church, for Winchester, as you know, is a cathedral town. Every grave is covered with flowers and from the head of each flutters a little American flag. The Bishop of Winchester is reading the prayers for the dead and the motley gathering, which is composed of townspeople of all classes (many of whom were in mourning for their own brave lads), doctors and nurses from the hospital and a few of the convalescent patients, stand with bowed heads in the spring sunshine.

"The idea of holding a little memorial service had occurred to us the day before, but when we tried to purchase flags for the occasion we found that they had all been bought up by the townspeople and on our return to the hospital we were told that the Mayor had invited us to the service. It was all planned and carried out without our even making a suggestion, and as I stood there among those graves I could think of only one thing: I wished, oh, how I wished, that the mothers of the boys whom we had laid there could know how carefully and tenderly their English cousins were looking after their last resting place.

"Winchester loved our boys. As we walked with them through the town, we would be stopped by half a dozen women who would come to their cottage doors to invite us in to tea. To give us bread and tea and jam in those days of short rations meant that they must deny themselves their favorite meal."

That "Old Swimming Hole" Of Singer's Sees New Sights

"Whoa, there!" called Miss Mississippi. "It's my turn now. I was stationed in the loveliest place in all England, the Paris Singer mansion at Paignton in Devonshire, which Mr. Singer (who is an American, by the way, of the sewing machine family) gave in the beginning of the war as a convalescent home for soldiers. My ward was in the old swimming pool, which had been drained and remodelled for

the purpose. St. George ward, it was called. My, but it makes me homesick to think of it! By the way, if you had come in a little earlier you would have heard our morning hymn. Let's repeat it for her, girls," and the four forthwith raised their voices and sang, "I Want to Go Back to Blighty."

"This talk about England and America not being friendly is all bosh," she continued. "I must admit that at first our boys didn't understand the Tommies any better than the Tommies understood them, and there were a few scraps between them, but I can tell you there was quite a different feeling among the boys of both countries who came to Paignton, after having fought side by side in the trenches. They understood each other all right then."

"We were treated like queens in England, the uniform was an open sesame everywhere; I believe we could have walked straight into the private sitting room at Buckingham Palace and no questions would have been asked."

"When we landed here nobody paid the slightest heed to the little group of army nurses who stood patiently beside the rail watching the joyful reception given the men and feeling like rank outsiders. No one, except one young man, who directly his eye lighted on us, rushed madly up the gangplank and across the deck. 'At last somebody has remembered us,' we thought."

"Which one of you women got decorated for bravery?" he called as he came toward us. When we replied that none of us had received that honor he grunted and turned disgustedly away. He was a cub reporter looking for copy."

"What Little Thing Is the Matter With You?"

"Well, at any rate, our boys do not forget us," said Miss St. Louis. "You should have seen the delegation that descended upon us yesterday. They are in Greenhut's Hospital, and they heard that their 'sisters' were here and they came 'en masse.' They had a wonderful time joshing us. When a man came into the hospital over there we used to greet him with:

"Well, son, what little thing is the matter with you?" and he usually replied:

"Nothing much, sister, 'cept I'm one leg shy," or "I mislaid a flapper out wonder," or "You can see daylight through my right side."

"Well, yesterday when those boys came in and saw us all lying here it was certainly tit for tat."

"Well, sister," they said, "what little thing is the matter with you?"

"Nothing much, son," we answered, "cept my heart keeps syncopated time or 'my left lung isn't what it used to be,' or 'jest a little infection in my arm.' You should have heard them laugh."

"Most wonderful boys in the world," said little Mississippi. "I was always proud of my country, but I'm prouder of it to-day than I ever was before. I tell you that among all the hundreds of our boys that I saw over there I never saw one thing in any one of them that I was ashamed of. And I knew them mighty well. There is a bond between those boys and their 'sisters' that is like no other bond on earth, and it's

A Dicker in "Panels" in War Times

From a Soldier's Letters

BACK again in the land of "Verboten," with its queer signs, queerer smells and piles of filth, and neglect everywhere.

To-night we are very comfortable in a village held before us by the Boche for four years—yesterday we were in one of his rustic rest camps, in a word—

even had a piano. While we were there I found seven or eight bolts of good white cloth—shroud cloth, for the Hun finds it cheaper to save the uniforms and use a winding sheet—and after we had salvaged enough for tablecloths and dishcloths I made my way down to D. W. headquarters and made a dicker with the division signal officer to trade him seven bolts of the cloth for some wire I needed—I knew he needed the cloth for "panels." Panels

being one of the new cogs in the machinery of war—they are small squares of white cloth used by the infantry to indicate the location of their camp for the infantry liaison plane whenever he flies over and asks them to "stake

out." Airmen usually burn up about \$57 worth of fireworks asking for the panel display before the doughboy discovers that he has used his panel as a hanky, or perhaps for a dishrag, and consequently has to peel off his nose too

white undershirt and spread it on the ground. We thought seriously of edging the panel with barb wire to prevent their use as mouchoirs, but about all we can do is to keep supplying the troops with new ones—so, to get back to my dicker,



The Tribune
Institute
In the World of Women